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Manchester
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Exploring South Asian participant attitudes and experiences of intercultural relationships using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and semi structured interviews.

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ABSTRACT

As individuals engage in an intercultural relationship they are exposed to a new culture which incorporates certain social norms and values. There is a lack of research which explores how South Asians in intercultural relationships experience acculturation. The acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) is valuable as it provides an understanding of how individuals undergo cultural change as they relocate to a different country. This study aims to explore the perceptions of South Asians in intercultural relationships, focusing on their experiences of encountering a new culture and whether there is an element of stigma enmeshed in their cultural community. Six bicultural South Asians who were raised in England took part in semi structured interviews where the data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Furthermore, the three master themes that were explored includes 'Concealed Relationship', 'Acceptance over Time' and 'Hybrid Identity'. The participants expressed a reluctance in openingly displaying their relationship within the South Asian community due to fears of negative perceptions. The participant's families experienced a change in perception as over the course of time they gave their approval. Furthermore, the intercultural relationship enabled the participants to gain a sense of cultural awareness as they engaged in their participant's traditions, suggesting that the relationship had beneficial impact.

KEY WORDS:	ACCULTURATIO N	BICULTURALISM	SOUTH ASIANS	INTERCULTURA L RELATIONSHIP	STIGMA
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Introduction

Definitions of Key Concepts

An intercultural relationship has been defined as a partnership between two individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds and therefore may differ in terms of race, ethnicity or religion (Skowroński et al, 2014). Furthermore, the rise in intercultural relationships is considered to be the result of processes such as immigration which allows individuals from a range of different cultural backgrounds to interact and integrate into society (Rodríguez-García, 2006). Consequently, intercultural relationships are suggested to represent the cultural diversity that exists within society (McFadden, 2001). Culture has been referred to as the way individuals behave according to norms, values, beliefs and principles within a societal group (Stevenson, 2010). As individuals associate themselves with a culture they integrate into a community, allowing them to build relationships with other individuals from the culture (Helweg, 2002).

Acculturation Theory

Acculturation is defined as the process of cultural change that an individual may experience when exposed to a new culture (Gibson, 2001). Berry's (1997) acculturation theory has predominately been used to explain the experiences of migrants, immigrants and refugees experience as they locate to a different country (Arends-Tóth and Van De Vijver, 2004; Colic-Peisker and Walker, 2003). Furthermore, as individuals encounter a new culture they may face the issue of cultural maintenance which refers to how significant the individual feels it is to maintain the culture of their origins. Additionally, individuals are also confronted with the question of cultural participation which refers to the degree to which individuals undertake cultural practices of the host country (Van Acker and Vanbeselaere, 2011). These dimensions interconnect to form the four acculturation strategies which includes assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation. Berry (1997) stated that assimilation is an individuals ability to accept and implement the culture of the host country and furthermore abandon the culture of their heritage. Conversely, individuals who dismiss the practices and norms of the host country and preserve their native cultural identity can lead them to be separated from society (Liu, 2011). Moreover, an individual may experience integration as they embrace and adopt the host culture whilst maintaining their heritage culture (Lee and Green, 2010). Although, individuals who have failed to integrate into the wider society and have no strong associations to their cultural origins can result in the feeling marginalised (Ward and Geeraert, 2016). Moreover, individuals who adopt the separation or marginalisation strategy are more likely to experience acculturative stress (Berry, 2005). Lueck and Wilson (2010) defined acculturative stress as the difficulties that individuals may encounter when adapting and adjusting to a new culture.

Biculturalism Theory

Acculturation is perceived to be important as the process of cultural change enables individuals to form a bicultural identity where they express and embrace the values of two different cultures (Sapiro, 2011). Furthermore, individuals who have the ability to adjust their behaviour to cater to the social norms of two different cultures are considered to be bicultural competent (Benbow and Rutland, 2017). Therefore, bicultural individuals are able to form an association with different cultures and join different cultural communities (West et al, 2017). Individuals may identify themselves as bicultural if they were raised in a country which has a different culture to their heritage background (Yamaguchi et al, 2016). Individuals may also portray themselves as bicultural when their parents are from two different cultures and have passed down values from two different cultures which the individual has adopted (Murdock, 2016). Manohar (2008)

explored the bicultural identity of second generation Indians who were open to engaging in an intercultural relationship, a common relationship within Western societies. However, bicultural Indians also perceived marriage as a highly important goal which is emphasised in the Indian culture. Although, Ahn (2018) criticised biculturalism theory stating that it did not take into account societal attitudes where many individuals experience difficulties expressing their bicultural identity. Furthermore, it was discovered that bicultural children may experience discrimination through society's negative perceptions at their parent's intercultural relationship.

Stigma in Intercultural Relationships

Stigma has been referred to as society's reaction of disapproval towards the characteristics or behaviours of a group or individual (Major and O'Brien, 2005). Furthermore, South African women who were in an intercultural relationship experienced isolation as they were subjected to negative body language such as staring and were excluded from family occasions (Van Der Walt and Basson, 2015). However, the research only took into account the experiences and the challenges that the women faced and thus did not explore the perspective of males who were in an intercultural relationship. Furthermore, Yahya et al (2016) revealed how Israeli and Palestinians living in Israel expressed a reluctance towards engaging in an intercultural relationship as it was portrayed in their community as a shameful act due to conflict between the two societal groups. This suggests how stigma may be enmeshed within the Israeli and South African cultural community who portray negative perceptions towards intercultural relationships. Although, there is a lack of research which explores whether intercultural relationships are associated with the stigma in the South Asian community.

Research on Intercultural Relationships from a Global Context

Previous research that has been conducted globally on intercultural relationships has explored the attitudes that people have, their understanding that individuals have of their partners culture and the impact of raising children in an intercultural family.

Additionally, Ruebelt et al (2016) illustrated how Iranian and European American couples embraced their culture and their partners culture. Furthermore, both partners participated in each others cultural traditions and celebrations allowing them to create a third culture which combined both of their native backgrounds. Although, this study involved participants completing a self report on marital satisfaction therefore, participants may have felt a sense of social pressure to portray their relationship in positive light (Berscheid and Regan, 2005). Potter and Thomas (2012) suggested that individuals who experienced challenges in their intercultural relationship face the judgement of society who initially condemned relationship. Furthermore, this suggests that people in intercultural relationships may be reluctant to express their relationship dissatisfaction due to fears that this may encourage and develop negative attitudes. The majority of Caucasian European participants living in Sweden were open to engaging in a romantic relationship with someone who was from a different culture and raising bicultural children (Törngren, 2011). Additionally, the participants presented a positive attitude towards the idea of family members engaging with an individual who did not originate from the same culture. Canlas et al (2015) found that East Asian and Caucasian couples had a higher relationship stability and satisfaction compared to endogamous East Asian couples. It was concluded that the couples were able to understand the perspective of their partner and their feelings and thus had a high score of partner empathy. Moreover, children whose parents came from different cultures were encouraged to openly discuss the different heritage culture of their parents (Ingram and Chaudhary, 2014). Although, both studies were conducted in a quantitative way and therefore lacks rich and detailed data which explores the experiences of the couples and children who were raised in an intercultural family (Kelle, 2006).

South Asian Cultural Perceptions of Relationships

Furthermore, individuals who identify their cultural heritage as South Asian are considered to have originated from countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal (Park, 2010). The intercultural relationships is perceived to represent individualistic values and thus digresses from the traditional partnership of an arranged marriage within the South Asian culture.

Arranged marriages are perceived as a union between the two families as well as the individuals and are common in the South Asian culture (Willerton, 2010). Moreover, this type of partnership involves the parents introducing their children to potential partners, taking into account factors such as family background, educational attainment and occupation (Chantler, 2014). This form of relationship is a reflection of the collectivist values which are highly emphasised in the South Asian culture where the individual fulfils the needs of the groups rather than the individual (Bejanyan et al, 2015). Consequently, this suggests that intercultural relationships may be perceived as a deviation from the South Asian culture as they incorporate individualistic values of partner selection which prioritises the individuals desires and interests (Bhalla, 2014).

Research on Intercultural Relationships Using South Asian Participants

Previous research that has involved South Asian participants in intercultural relationships has explored the perceptions of their families and their reactions. Additionally, there has been some research which has focused on the concept of preserving the identity of the cultural heritage.

Yahya and Boag (2014) explored the attitudes of Indian, Middle Eastern, South African, Asian, American and Australians and the perceptions of their parents towards intercultural relationships. It was highly emphasised that the participant's parents displayed a negative attitude towards their child engaging in a romantic partnership with an individual from a different race. However, Seshadri and Knudson-Martin (2013) discovered that Indian parents slowly accepted and acknowledged their child's intercultural relationship after gaining a better understanding of their child's partner. Furthermore, this suggests that individuals experienced a change in perception as they developed an understanding of intercultural relationships.

Grewal (2009) illustrated how South Asian Muslims were hesitant to engage in a romantic relationship with an individual who was not from the same culture as their parents felt strongly about teaching and passing down cultural traditions and values to the next generation and furthermore did not want their culture to break down slowly over time. Although, this view is challenged by Inman et al (2011) where Asian Indian and Caucasian couples placed an emphasis on teaching their children about both cultures and participating in various cultural traditions. Additionally, the participants demonstrated that some of their parents who had initially condemned the intercultural relationship started to accept their child's partner over the course of time. Moreover, Buisson (2016) stated how it was accepted for a Muslim male to marry a female from a different faith such as Christianity and Judaism however, it was forbidden for a Muslim female to marry out of the Islamic faith. Furthermore, this conveys how Muslims may experience disapproval as the act of an intercultural relationships may be portrayed as a threat to their izzat which is defined as family honour (Singh, 2017).

Rationale

Individuals in intercultural relationships encounter and experience a different culture through their partner (Fu et al, 2001). There is a gap in the research which explores how South Asians in intercultural relationships experience acculturation as they engage in a new culture and

experience a cultural change. Furthermore, it would be valuable to explore how South Asians may adapt to being in a relationship with someone from a different culture.

The majority of research conducted on intercultural relationships that has explored stigma has suggested that many individuals may display their disapproval by excluding the individuals in the intercultural relationships. Previous research has examined how relationships are perceived in the South Asian culture, conveying how intercultural relationships stems away from the collectivist values and high family involvement that are emphasised in the culture (Thiagarajan, 2007). Although, there is a lack of research which explores whether South Asians experience a sense of stigma through the reactions of the South Asian community.

Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research study is to explore the experiences and attitudes of South Asians in an intercultural relationship. The study aims to explore how South Asians portray and perceive their relationship and the impact that it has had on them. The objective of this study was to conduct semi structured interviews with South Asians participants and analyse the data using IPA in order to reveal how the South Asian community perceive intercultural relationships. Furthermore, by using IPA this will enable the researcher to explore how the participants illustrate their bicultural identities and the impact of being exposed to a new culture.

Research Questions

The research question for this study was 'How do South Asians in intercultural relationships experience a sense of acculturation and what impact does this have on the individual?' Another research question that the study intended to answer is 'Do South Asians in intercultural relationships experience stigma and what is the impact on the individuals?' Additionally, the study explores 'How does the intercultural relationship allow the South Asians to express their bicultural identity?'

Methodology

Qualitative Research

A qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore an individual's attitude and their perception of the world (Lyons and Coyle, 2007). Furthermore, a qualitative approach was selected for this research study as it provides rich and detailed data about an individual's experience (Kaiser, 2009). This would enable the researcher to gain in depth data and develop an understanding about the experiences of South Asians in intercultural relationships.

Semi Structured Interviews

Semi structured interviews was selected as the method of data collection in order to gain qualitative data about South Asian experiences of intercultural relationships. Semi structured interviews involve participants responding to questions that were set by the researcher prior to the conduction of the interview and questions that are based on the participant's responses during the interview (Jamshed, 2014). This allows the researcher to ensure that the data collected is relevant to the research project whilst maintaining flexibility (Stuckey, 2013). Moreover, semi structured interviews can be tailored towards each participant as it allows them to discuss what aspects they feel are important and relevant to their experience (Miles and Gilbert, 2005). Furthermore, this method of interviewing assists participants to have a sense of freedom over what dimensions of the topic they wish to discuss and share (Ponto, 2006). Furthermore, this type of interviewing is portrayed as an empowering tool, supporting individuals to share their journey and experience (Rabionet, 2011). Semi structured interviews assists

individuals to share their experience by allowing them the chance for their voice to be heard and their story to be told (Adams, 2010). Furthermore, semi structured interviews were considered to be appropriate for this research project as it ensures that the participants are able to freely express their view and illustrate their experience of being in a intercultural relationship from their own perception.

Researcher

The researcher shared the same demographic characteristics as the participants as the researcher also comes from a South Asian background. Furthermore, this may help to facilitate the formation of rapport between the researcher and the participants. This is crucial in order to allow the participants to content and comfortable disclosing their experience and perceptions (Dickson-Swift et al, 2007). Furthermore, researchers who share the same race, ethnicity or cultural background as participants allowed the participants to trust the researcher (Bhopal, 2010).

IPA

The approach used to analyse the data was IPA which allows the researcher to gain an insight into the lived experience of an individual (Smith, 2004). An individual's experience can be understood through the lens of different elements such as temporality, intersubjectivity, embodiment and spatiality (Ashworth, 2003). Brooks (2015) suggested that temporality is referred to the way individuals portray certain life events which may change or remain consistent across different time periods. Spatiality is defined as the way individuals understand events in certain environments and settings (O'Reilly and Dogra, 2017). Furthermore, intersubjectivity explores the relationships between people and the way they network with each other in society (Zahavi, 2001). Embodiment refers to the way individuals experience the world through their bodies (Hemingway, 2011). IPA places an emphasis on the importance of the participants, conveying how they are experts by experience (Smith et al, 2009). Furthermore, its idiographic approach allows the researcher to explore the perception and experiences of the participants and thus creates a rich and detailed understanding of the topic explored (Smith and Osborn, 2015). IPA also encompasses a double hermeneutic approach where the research attempts to understand the participant's experiences as the participants make sense of the topic (Chan and Farmer, 2017).

The first step of the IPA process involves the researcher reading the data multiple times in order to become familiar with it (Alase, 2017). Furthermore, the researcher then writes brief notes which may focus on certain words or involve rephrasing parts of the text (Charlick et al, 2016). Furthermore, emerging themes are identified and developed by referring to the notes that were previously made. The fourth step involves the researcher looking for connections between themes, therefore sub themes may be clustered into superordinate themes (Jeong and Othman, 2016). Furthermore, the researcher searches for patterns across all transcripts and identifies similar themes (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014).

Participants

The participants were selected using opportunity sampling where the researcher uses participants based on who is available and who the researcher has access to (Eysenck, 2014). Furthermore, participants were recruited after through an invitation email (see appendix) and a poster (see appendix) which was placed in a temple where the researcher has frequently visited from a young age. Furthermore, the poster and invitation email contained details about the nature of the study. Cooper et al (2012) proposed that six participants was a suitable amount of participants for IPA research. The participants were all involved in an intercultural relationship,

originated from a South Asian background and lived in England. Therefore, they met the inclusion criteria for the study.

Table 1. Participant Information.

Participant	Gender	Cultural Background	Religious Orientation	Partner Cultural Background	Partner Religious Orientation
R	Female	Indian	Hindu	Middle Eastern	Muslim
S	Male	Indian	Hindu	Iranian	Muslim
A	Female	Indian	Hindu	English	Catholic
T	Male	Sri Lankan	Catholic	Turkish	Muslim
H	Female	Pakistani	Muslim	Irish	Catholic
F	Male	Bangladeshi	Muslim	English	Christian

Procedure

After reading the invitation email and poster the participants got in contact with the researcher in order to express their interest in the study (see appendix). The participants were given the participant information sheet in order to learn more about the study and received a consent form (see appendix). After gaining informed consent, the participants took part in a semi structured interview which varied from thirty minutes long to forty minutes long. Before the interviews commenced the participants were reassured that if needed they were able to take breaks during the interview in order to create a relaxed environment. Some of the interview questions (see appendix) were set before the interview and were approved by the Manchester Metropolitan University ethics committee.

Materials

The materials that were required for the study was an iPad to record the interviews in order to allow the interviews to be transcribed.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the study, the researcher gained ethical approval by the Manchester Metropolitan Ethics Committee (see appendix). Participants were free to withdraw before the interviews began, during the interview process and one month after the interviews had finished in order to respect the participants rights in research (Orb et al, 2001). Furthermore, the study ensured that the participants were anonymous as they were referred to by pseudonyms. This is important in order to prevent the participant from being identified (Roberts, 2015). Although, confidentiality could not be assured as the researcher included the participant's quotes in the analysis section of the report.

Moreover, the participants received the participant's information sheet and consent forms before any interviews took place which provided information about the topic and aims of the research in order to prevent the participants from being deceived. The participant information sheet included information about services such as Asian Family Counselling Service if they felt that a service of this kind may be beneficial to them. Berger (2015) suggested that participants may be more

willing to engage in research with a researcher who has information about helpful and useful resources. After the interviews were conducted the interviews were transcribed and protected by a password. Additionally, after the interviews were transcribed the recorded interviews were destroyed.

Analysis

IPA was used to explore the experiences and attitudes of six bicultural South Asian participants in intercultural relationships. The focus was on the whether the participants experienced acculturation through their partnership and whether they experienced stigma through the reactions and attitudes of other individuals in society. The three main themes that were illustrated were 'Concealed Relationship', 'Acceptance over Time' and 'Hybrid Identity'. Additionally, 'Acceptance over Time' and 'Hybrid Identity' also contained encompassed sub themes.

1.0 Concealed Relationship

The theme of contained relationship refers to how the participants suggested that they hid their relationship from their cultural community and from their families. Furthermore, the element of embodiment is explored as the participants suggested how they were reluctant in engaging in public displays of affection such as holding hands.

'When I meet up with him in Manchester I'm more open to holding hands and stuff but I wouldn't do that at home.' (R, 188-189)

'She was worried about her parents finding out so we wouldn't hang around near her house or anything.' (T, 202-203)

The participants suggested that they may use reserved body language in environments with a high South Asian population compared to cities with a more diverse population. Furthermore, this conveys how the participants are bicultural competent as they are able to adjust their body language with their partner depending on social norms within their environment. Furthermore, this is supported by Vaquera and Kao (2005) where couples who came from different races were less inclined to engage in public displays of affection compared to intra-racial couples. This proposes that there is a sense of stigma and disapproval to openingly displaying their intercultural relationship as participants may be worried as to how others may react.

'Oh no we wouldnt kiss or do anything like that in public, we were worried someone would see us.' (F, 193-194)

'Even if I wanted to hold hands I just couldn't.' (R, 186)

The participants expressed their difficulties in engaging in physically intimate behaviour such as holding hands with their partner in areas where they are likely to be seen by family members. Furthermore, this suggests that the participants were mindful and wary of their surroundings and the socially acceptable way to behave. Yahya et al (2016) discovered that Israeli and Palestinians were more inclined to engage in an intercultural relationship if they lived in a society where it was more accepted. Furthermore, this suggests how the values and attitudes that individuals may have towards intercultural relationships is dependent on the environment and space that they are in.

'I think at first it was hard because it was all a big secret his family knew all about it but my family didn't.' (A, 199-200)

Moreover, participants conveyed how they kept their intercultural relationship private from their family which suggests how the participants were not ready to openly communicate their relationship to their family and to the community. This is related to Zaidi et al (2016) who discovered that dating within the South Asian community is portrayed as a culturally deviant behaviour therefore many South Asians may keep their relationships hidden.

2.0 Acceptance over Time

The participants conveyed how when their parents first learnt about their relationship they expressed a disapproval and struggled to internalise the idea of their child being with another individual from a different culture. This theme explores temporality as the families gradually gave their support and thus suggests that the families adapted and adjusted their attitude.

2.1 Growing Up

During their childhood, the participants expressed how intercultural relationships and marriages were not very common in the South Asian community.

'when I was growing up we didn't see very much intercultural marriages.' (S, 129)

'I don't remember seeing a lot of intercultural marriages when I was younger.' (F, 144-145)

Furthermore, this suggests that the participants were rarely exposed to intercultural relationships and thus may not have been perceived as the social norm in the South Asian culture. Van der Walt and Basson (2015) found that South African women who were in an intercultural relationship were disowned from family events therefore this suggests how intercultural relationships were ignored and thus were not highly visible in the community.

'...based on your own upbringing so a lot of the older generation will have brought up in a different country, so in South Asian countries where intercultural relationships were very uncommon...people used to get married by getting introduced by other people' (S, 55-58).

Furthermore, the participant explains how the environment may influence an individual's perception of intercultural relationships. Therefore, individuals internalise social norms of an environment and moulds their attitudes. Furthermore, this highlights how intercultural relationships differ from the way relationships were traditionally formed within the South Asian culture (Willerton, 2010).

2.2 Initial Reaction

The participants conveyed how when their families and the South Asian community first discovered the intercultural relationship they expressed an element of disapproval.

'but her dad was a bit reluctant' (T, 131)

'My dad was a bit more hesitant, he didn't necessarily agree with the fact that I was marrying someone who was not part of my culture...' (S, 185-186)

This suggests how as the intercultural relationship was first revealed to the families, the participants struggled to gain their approval as the families tried to internalise the concept. Consequently, the families experience acculturation through the separation strategy as they express their disapproval to accepting an individual of another culture into the family. Furthermore, the families of the participants may have experienced acculturative stress as they struggled to adapt to the concept of an individual being brought into the family who originates from a different culture and thus may have different cultural values and beliefs. Yahya and Boag

(2014) where participants stated that many of their parents displayed negative attitudes and placed an important emphasis on maintaining traditions.

'they couldn't fundamentally understand why I would marry a non muslim.' (H, 218-219)

Furthermore, this is supported by Buisson (2016) who stated that it was forbidden for a Muslim female to marry a non-Muslim, suggesting how intercultural relationships may be associated with stigma within the Islamic faith as it conflicts with religious values.

2.3 Gradual Approval

The participants demonstrated how their families processed the news of their intercultural relationships over the course of time.

'my family have now, after I'd say its been ten months, they have now come around to the idea.' (H, 221-222)

'Where they were hesitant as first as time has gone on as my partner has described and explained the situation and spoken about it a bit more they are slowly starting to accept it.' (S, 316-318)

Furthermore, the participants conveyed how their families gradually welcomed their relationship suggesting how they adopted an optimistic and positive outlook. This suggests that the participants experienced a sense of acculturation by being welcomed into the family and thus allowed them to integrate into a new culture whilst also maintaining a belonging to their heritage culture. Therefore, the South Asians maintain their bicultural identity by gaining the family approval in their relationship whilst becoming independent in terms of selecting their partner. Similarly, Törngren (2011) discovered that the majority of Swedish participants were accepting of the concept of family members engaging in an intercultural relationship.

'Its amazing to see from last February or March when I first told my family and they just didn't want to talk about it..., to now the point where my family are quite open about it and they are happy to kind of meet his family.' (H, 263-265)

'as my partner has described and explained the situation and spoken about it a bit more they are slowly starting to accept it.' (S, 316-318)

'But eventually it did work out in our way and when we finally met each others families' (T, 131-132)

'he has realised that we are happy ... I think he's [her father] coming to terms with it now.' (A, 171-173)

As the families become more open minded, this suggests that there is less stigma around intercultural relationships compared to when the participants were growing up. Furthermore, first generation Indian parents experienced a change in perception as although they initially expressed a disapproval however as they gained an understanding of over the concept they supported their child's and their intercultural relationship (Seshadri and Knudson-Martin; 2013 Inman et al, 2011). Additionally, it also demonstrates how the participants display resilience by overcoming challenges that they faced regarding family and social acceptance and thus may make their relationship stronger. This disagrees with Zhang et al (2009) who suggested that relationships where the partners came from a different race were less stable than endogamous couples.

3.0 Hybrid Identity

The theme of hybrid identity shows the benefits that the participants experienced whilst being in an intercultural relationship as they learn and indulge in a new culture and discussed future plans for raising children. Intersubjectivity is explored in this theme as the participants consider they are able to incorporate both cultures into their relationship with their partner and the relationships with their children.

3.1 Partnership

The participants illustrated how the participants displayed a willingness to participate in their cultural traditions and practices and may experience a sense of cultural adaptation.

'...just getting the happy medium because we know now there is two cultures being mixed together.' (A, 217)

'We just respect each others background and where we come from.' (S, 161)

'I guess we are both lenient ... we don't hold onto our religion. Its just a part of it.' (H, 176-177)

Furthermore, this suggests how through their relationship with their partner, participants have gained a sense of appreciation towards different cultures. Their intercultural relationship represents a sense of unity where the participants are able to work together to understand the cultural differences in order to be considerate and sensitive. Canlas et al (2015) stated that East Asian and white couples were suggested to have a higher ability at understanding their partner and showing a sense of empathy and thus had a high rate of relationship satisfaction.

'Anything that my partner celebrates such as cultural festivals like the Iranian New Year I would also participate in.' (S, 325-326)

'but I think its nice to combine and have a new world open to you and he will be doing the same with our family.' (A, 215-216)

Moreover, participants suggested that they would embrace their partner's cultural practices and expressed an enthusiasm in joining their partner's cultural community. This can help to promote a sense of belonging to a new cultural group as they build relationships with their partners family and community. Furthermore, this suggests how the participants expressed their bicultural identity by conveying how they are able to adopt the values and cultural practices of two differing cultures. The participants demonstrate that they experienced a sense of acculturation by integrating two cultures into their relationship which may help their partner feel valued and accepting towards their background. This is supported by Ruebelt et al (2016) who discovered how Iranian and European American couples integrated aspects of their native culture into their relationship and emerged themselves in their partner's culture. This enabled them to gain a greater understanding of their partner's cultural background.

'I'm learning a different language.' (T, 208)

'I can't understand the language but slowly im picking it up and he's teaching me which is good.' (R,97-98)

The participants suggested that by learning the native language of their partner's culture this will allow them to communicate with family members and the cultural community. Furthermore, this shows how the participants embraced a sense of diversity in their lives. Children with parents

from different cultures stated that they were interested in learning the different native languages of their parent's heritage in order to identify with the culture (Ingram and Chaudhary, 2014).

3.2 Raising Children

Furthermore, partners emphasised how they would adopt a flexible approach when child rearing so that they where they are exposed to different cultures in order to gain a sense of cultural awareness.

'we would be very much open to them going church or if they wanted to go to the temple again we would be very much open.' (A, 226-227)

The participants suggest that when raising children in the future they would encourage and support their child to participate in the different cultural traditions and festivals. Furthermore, the participant's liberal attitudes towards culture conveys how the participants may inspire their children to take pride in their bicultural identity. Edwards et al (2010) portrayed the importance for children to engage in their parents heritage in order to form a connection with their parents background.

'teach our children that they have two different cultures and teach them a bit about both.' (S, 329-330)

'I think being from two different cultural houses... we would very much integrate that into our own house.' (A, 223-224)

This challenges Grewal (2009) who suggested that many second generation South Asians were reluctant to engage in a relationship with an individual who was from a different culture as they felt that this would lead to a deterioration of cultural values over the generations. The participants suggested they would encourage their children to adopt a bicultural identity as they take on an active involvement in both cultures, allowing them to form and maintain an association to both cultures.

Summary and Implications for Further Research

Overall, the study adds to current literature by exploring the participant's experiences and their perception of intercultural relationships. The study supports the acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) and biculturalism suggesting how individuals undergo cultural change as they engage in an intercultural relationship and adopt the features of two cultures. Furthermore, individuals in intercultural relationships experienced the integration acculturation strategy as they created an identity which embraces both cultures which united the individuals together and provides a foundation for future child rearing with a focus on forming a bicultural identity. However, the study provided a different dimension exploring how the families may experience acculturation as they may initially express the separation strategy. This is demonstrated as the families initially displayed a reluctance to welcoming an individual from another culture into the family although over the course of time they accepted an individual from another culture coming into the family. Therefore, the study demonstrates how intercultural relationships are a learning experience for both the individuals in the relationship as they learn about a new culture and also the family members who may learn how to become more accepting. Furthermore, acceptance and approval is important in order to challenge stigmatic attitudes and perceptions. Moreover, this highlights the impact that intercultural relationships has on the individuals and on the families.

The topic of intercultural relationships is often perceived as a taboo subject within the South Asian community (Pirbhai, 2009). Furthermore, by conducting research of this nature this helps to raise awareness over the challenges and benefits that individuals may experience. By

highlighting the benefits that individuals in intercultural relationships experience such as indulging into a new culture this may help to develop societies understanding of intercultural relationship even further. This is important as it may help to encourage discussion within the community over intercultural relationships and support them in adopting an open minded attitude and perception to intercultural relationships. Moreover, this will allow to society to celebrate the diversity of relationships that exists in society.

Limitations

Although, this study interviewed participants separately and thus future research may include conducting joint interviews with couples in intercultural relationships. Interviewing couples together provides more rich and in depth data as the couple may engage in a discussion about a particular topic and thus allows the researcher to analyse the interaction between the couples (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2014). Additionally, another limitation of the study was that none of the couples were married. Consequently, for future study it would be useful to explore whether individuals experienced a sense of acculturation on the wedding day and during their marriage.

Reflexivity

Whilst growing up in a South Asian culture in Britain I was exposed to various perceptions and attitudes of intercultural relationships. Furthermore, this motivated me to explore what it means to be a South Asian individual in an intercultural relationship.

As I also come from a South Asian background and had a similar upbringing to some of the participants this enabled them to feel that they could relate to me. Furthermore, this allowed them to open up about their experiences of being in an intercultural relationship during the interview. This allowed the participants to feel comfortable sharing their journey and thus enabled the participants to feel empowered. The participants were able to feel relaxed when expressing their story and their perception, drawing upon how it made them feel and the impact the relationship had on them. Archer (2002) discovered that South Asian Muslims felt more at ease talking to a South Asian female interviewer about their experiences relating to the South Asian culture as they had a greater understanding of certain issues.

Additionally, as I was born in Great Britain and raised in a South Asian household I also identify myself as a bicultural individual. Furthermore, I have adopted the Western values as well as maintaining South Asian values which were passed down to me from my parents. This enabled the participants to feel that we had shared experiences through our similar lifestyles and thus allowed me to be considered as an insider. This is important in order to for the participants to feel a sense of trust to the researcher (Saran, 2016). Additionally, the participants felt that they weren't being judged for their responses and which enabled them to have a sense of freedom when talking about their relationships. This was important in order to explore the idea of intersubjectivity in terms of their interaction with their partnership and the South Asian community. Overall, I enjoyed conducting this research and found it rewarding as I believe research of this nature helps to provide a platform for South Asians to voice their experiences of how intercultural relationships have benefited them.

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